

Chapter XIII— Principal Brown

REALLY, this final close of the most important discussion of the most important book of the most important grand division of the great Spencerian Synthetic Philosophy can only be fitly treated by calling on the imagination for an illustration:

Mr. J. D. Brown, for some time before our civil war a prominent citizen of Vicksburg, Miss., was a native of Connecticut, of Puritan stock and thrifty habits. Beginning life as a clock-maker, he emigrated when a young man to that part of Ohio, settled from New England, which is still in those regions known as the Western Reserve. There he went to school-teaching, joined a local literary society, and made some speeches which were highly applauded, and in which he did not hesitate to denounce slavery as the sum of all villainies, and to declare for immediate, unconditional emancipation. Somewhat later on, he went South and settled at Vicksburg, where he became professor of moral philosophy in a young ladies' seminary, and, finally, its principal. Being prudent in speaking of the peculiar institution, and gaining a reputation for profundity, he became popular in the best society, a favourite guest in the lavish hospitalities of the wealthier planters, and, in the Southern manner, was always spoken of to visitors with pride as "Principal Brown, one of our most distinguished men, sir! a great educator, and a great authority on moral philosophy, sir!"

The slavery question was in the meantime growing hotter and hotter. There were no abolitionists in Vicksburg or in the country about, for any one suspected of abolitionism was promptly lynched, or sent North in a coat of tar and feathers. But slaves were occasionally disappearing, among them some of especial value as mechanics; and even a very valuable yellow girl, whose beauty and accomplishments were such that her owner had refused \$5,000 for her, had been spirited off by the underground railroad. And "society" in Vicksburg was becoming more and more excited. Though no one yet dreamed that it was destined ere long to redden the Mississippi, and light the skies of Vicksburg with bursting bombs, the cloud on the northern horizon was visibly swelling and darkening, and in "bleeding Kansas" a guerrilla war had already crimsoned the grass.

Still, the lines of Principal Brown were cast in pleasant places, and he received the honours due to a great philosopher, deemed all the greater by those who in their secret hearts did not find his moral philosophy quite intelligible; for he not only made a practice of using the longest words and of interlarding his discourses with references to people of whom his auditors had never heard, and of whom he could say anything he pleased, but he had taken Balzac's hint, and every now and again he strung together a series of words that sounded as though they might mean something, but really had no meaning at all. He had thus gained a reputation for great profundity with those who vainly puzzled over them, and who attributed their difficulty to an ignorance they were ashamed to admit.

But one woeful day there came to Vicksburg some echo of one of his debating-club speeches in the Western Reserve, and some of the leading citizens deemed fit to interrogate him. He had to lie a little, but succeeded in quieting them; and as not much was said about the matter, his standing in Vicksburg society was, in general unchanged.

Following this, however, something worse happened. The Rev Dr Sorely, one of the most eloquent divines of the Methodist Church South, made a trip to Ohio, and in the Western Reserve delivered a lecture on the biblical and patriarchal system of labor as practiced by our Southern brethren. Among the auditors was a man who remembered and quoted some of the eloquent utterances, on the other side, of the reverend doctor's friend, Principal Brown. The matter might have passed unheeded, but that the Vicksburg Thunderbolt, anticipating much glory to the South from the Northern visit of its eloquent defender, had sent a special correspondent with him; and a report of the lecture, including the reference to Principal Brown, duly appeared in its columns.

This was indeed a serious matter, and the Principal wrote immediately to the *Thunderbolt* with feeling and vehemence. He said that he feared that if he remained silent many would think he had said things he had not said; intimated that he had never been in Ohio, and what he had said when he was there he had said for the purpose of finding a secure basis for slavery; that he had only been talking of transcendental ethics, and not of sublunary ethics at all; that he had always insisted that the slave-owners of the South should be paid in full for their slaves; that he had never supposed that the question

would come up for millions of years yet; and that the most he had said was that, "It may be doubted, if it does not possibly seem inferable, that perhaps there may be reason to suspect that at some future time the slaves may be liberated, after paying to their owners more than they are worth; but I have no positive opinion as to what may hereafter take place, and am only sure that, if emancipation ever does take place, the negroes must pay to their owners far more in interest on their purchase money than they now pay in work."

To most of the citizens of Vicksburg this seemed entirely satisfactory, but there were some dissentients. Colonel F. E. Green strongly urged patriotic citizens not to think of such a thing as treating the Principal to a coat of tar and feathers and Professor Bullhead, of the leading young men's seminary, wrote to the Thunderbolt, requesting his respected colleague to give a categorical answer to the question "whether, when A B went to the slave-pen and bought a negro, the negro was or was not his property, morally as well as legally." If yes, then Professor Bullhead wanted to know what his learned and respected friend meant by admitting the possibility of emancipation even some millions of years hence; and if no, then Professor Bullhead wanted Principal Brown to tell him why the slaves, before regaining their freedom, must pay their owners more than they were worth. And Professor Bullhead closed with some sarcastic references to transcendental ethics.

Principal Brown did not answer this plain question of his friend Professor Bullhead, but got rid of him as quickly as he could, telling him that there was no dispute between them, since they both insisted on the right of any citizen to work and whip his own negro, and then luring him off into a long discussion of transcendental ethics vs. sub-lunary ethics. But it was evident that something more had to be done, and the papers soon contained an announcement that Principal Brown proposed to forego for a time the publication of Volumes XXIV and XXV of his great work on Moral Philosophy, and immediately to bring out Volume XXVI, containing a chapter on the slavery question, which he proposed to read to the citizens of Vicksburg at a public meeting.

The lecture drew a large audience of the first citizens of Vicksburg. There was also a sprinkling of rougher citizens, some of whom before entering the hall deposited in a rear lot a long rail that they had

brought with them, and some pails that smelled like tar, with a number of large but evidently light sacks. However, the lecture was a great success, and at the close, Principal Brown's hand was nearly shaken off, and he was escorted to his home by an enthusiastic and cheering crowd, who vowed that nothing like such a "demolisher to the nigger-lovers" had ever been heard in Vicksburg before.

But although the stately periods of the Principal are occasionally marred by what is evidently a reportorial tendency to the slang of the time, let me quote from the papers of the next day, which contained long reports of the speech, accompanied with glowing encomiums:—

(From the Vicksburg *Thunderbolt*, June 19, 1859)

The wealth and beauty and fashion of Vicksburg turned out in full force last evening to listen to a lecture on the slavery question by our distinguished townsman, Principal J. D. Brown, the widely honoured writer on moral philosophy. In the audience our reporter counted thirty-seven colonels, two majors, and thirty-two judges, besides the pastors of all the leading churches. It is a great pity, as many of the enthusiastic hearers said, while congratulating Principal Brown and each other at the conclusion, that William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips themselves could not have been there; for if their miserable nigger-loving hides could be penetrated by the solid blocks of learning, the unanswerable logic, and the mathematical demonstrations which Principal Brown poured into his audience, they would have sung exceedingly small; even if they had not seen the full wickedness of their efforts to rob the widow and the orphan by interfering with our beneficent domestic institution.

Much of Principal Brown's lecture it will be impossible to give to our readers this morning, for our reporter, not being well versed in moral philosophy, finds himself unable from his notes to make sense of some of the more profound passages and is uncertain as to how some of the authorities cited spell their names. There was some confusion, too, in the hall when Principal Brown touched on the subject of transcendental ethics, and said that he had always held, and always would hold, that in transcendental ethics all men were pretty much alike. But Colonel Johnson rose in his place and stilled the disturbance, asking the audience to keep their coats on till the Principal got through; and when Principal Brown explained the transcendental ethics related to the other side of the moon, while sublunary ethics related to this side of the moon, there was silence again. It was in the wind-up, however, that the professor got in his best work, and roused his audience to the highest pitch of delight and enthusiasm. He said:—

"There are people who contend that these negro slaves of the South, after they have paid their owners in full the compensation due them, ought to be put back in their native land. But how are we to find who brought them here? Some were brought in Spanish vessels, some in Portuguese vessels, some in Dutch, some in English, and some in American vessels; and these vessels are all by this time sunk or destroyed, and their owners and crews are dead, and their descendants have got mixed. Besides, they only got the negroes from the barracoons on the African coast. Who is to tell where the ancestor of each one was taken from and who took him to the coast? Many of these slaves bear such names as Brown, Smith, Jones, and Simpson, names borne by the very men who brought their progenitors here. Then they have such given names as Caesar, Hannibal, Dick, Tom, Harry, Ephraim, Alexander, and Nebuchadnezzar, so that no one can tell from their names whether they originally came from Africa or England, Italy, Jerusalem, Greece, or Assyria. And what have these negroes ever done for freedom? Did any one ever hear of them expressing any sympathy for the independence of Greece, or protesting against the Russian invasion of Hungary, or even contributing for the conversion of the Jews, or for sending missionaries to the South Sea Islands, where only man is vile? Contrariwise, when British tyranny invaded our shores did not these negroes work just as readily for the hirelings of King George as they did for their own patriotic masters who were fighting the battles of liberty? And to-day when a nigger runs away, where does he head for? Does he not make a straight streak for Canada, a country groaning under the government of an effete monarchy, and with a full-fledged aristocrat for governor-general? One would like to know that these negro slaves, whom it is proposed to send back to their native land when they have compensated their owners, have some real love for free institutions, before thrusting freedom upon them.

"To think that slavery was wrongly established is natural, and not without warrant in transcendental ethics. But if we entertain the thought of rectification, there arises in the first place the question—who enslaved them? Their owners did not. They only bought them. These negroes were enslaved by negroes like themselves,—likely enough by their own mothers, cousins, and aunts. Now which are the descendants of the one and which of the other? and where are they to be found? But supposing that they could be found, there would still have to be recognized a transaction which goes far to prevent rectification. If we are to go back upon the past at all, we must go back upon the past wholly, and take account of what it has cost to feed and clothe and keep these negroes since they have been here.

"I have consulted one of our most eminent negro traders, a gentleman who has probably bought and sold more negroes than anyone in the South-west, and after a close calculation, he informs me that taking men, women

and children together, and considering the loss of their labor which their owners have to suffer in the rearing of children, sickness, and old age, and the cost of overseers, drivers, patrols, and an occasional pack of bloodhounds, the average negro costs the average owner a fraction over \$267.57 per annum. But as I wish to be generous to the negro I have thrown off the 57 cents and a fraction, and will put their cost to their masters at only \$267 a year.

"Now, the first cargo of negro slaves was landed in Jamestown, Va., in the year 1620, and the external slave-trade was abolished in 1808. We may therefore assume the average time during which each negro has been in this country as one hundred and fifty years. Saying nothing whatever about interest, it is thus clear that each living negro owes to his owner as the cost of keeping him, \$267 a year for one hundred and fifty years, which, excluding interest, amounts at the present time to just \$40,050. (Great applause.)"

Here a man in a back seat rose, and in a decidedly Yankee accent asked Principal Brown if he included negro babies? The Principal replying in the affirmative, the intruder began: "How can a negro baby just born owe any one forty thou—" The rest of the sentence was lost by the sudden exit of the intruder from the hall, over the heads of the audience. There was quite an excitement for a few moments, but Colonel Johnson again rose and restored order by asking the young men in the rear not to escort the interrupter farther than the vacant lot adjoining until the close of the proceedings, as the audience were intent on enjoying the remainder of the logical feast which their distinguished townsman was laying before them. All being quiet again, Principal Brown resumed:

"Observe that the negroes have not an equitable claim to themselves in their present condition—washed, clothed and fed, civilized, Christianized and taught how to work—but only to themselves in their primitive wild and uncivilized condition. Now, what is the relation between the original 'wild nigger' value of each slave and what each one of them has received from his owner during one hundred and fifty years? We know that they were bought at the barracoons, delivered on board ship at prices ranging from a half-pound of beads to a bottle of rum or a Manchester musket, the owners, being at the cost of transporting them to America, including the heavy insurance caused by the necessarily great mortality, items which as you will observe I have not charged against the existing slaves. My friend the slave merchant estimates that on an average 15s. 9d. English money would be a high rate. Let us call it, however, \$4 American money. Thus we see that an equitable rectification would require that each negro in the South should pay his owner a balance of \$40,046! (Loud and long-continued applause.)"

"Now, when in the Western Reserve many years ago, I drew from transcendental ethics the corollary that the ownership of a man could not be eq-

uitably alienated from the man himself, and argued that after the slaves had compensated their owners they should be freed, I had overlooked the foregoing considerations. Moreover, I did not clearly see what would be implied by the giving of compensation for all that during these one hundred and fifty years it has cost the owner to keep the slave. While, therefore, I adhere to the inference originally drawn—that is to say, as far as transcendental ethics is concerned—a fuller consideration of the matter has led me to the conclusion that slavery, subject to the right of the slave to buy himself on payment to his owner of what he has cost, say \$40,046, should be maintained. But it may be readily seen that such a transaction would be a losing one to the slaves themselves, for at the present market price of negroes, they are not worth, big and little, more than \$1,000 each. And, whereas I have also said that I really did not know but that in the course of some millions of years it might possibly be that the slaves could be allowed their freedom on paying to their owners full compensation, I now see, since what is due from them to their masters is constantly increasing, that with humanity as it now is, the implied reorganization would become more and more unprofitable. (Still louder and longer applause, led by Professor Bullhead, who called for three times three cheers, which were given with a will, the audience rising and the ladies waving their handkerchiefs.)

"I also wish to point out that all this talk about giving their freedom to the slaves is as foolish as it is wicked. Since under our laws the slave himself is the property of the master, the slaves already have their freedom in the freedom of the master. Thus the equal freedom of each to do all that he wills, provided that he interferes not with the equal freedom of all others, as taught by transcendental ethics, is already recognized by the laws of the South, and nothing more remains for us to do, except to keep abolitionist theories from spreading in this 'land of the free and home of the brave!' "

The uproarious enthusiasm of the audience could no longer be restrained, and, led by Professor Bullhead, who rushed on the stage and embraced Principal Brown, our best citizens crowded round him. During this time the wretch who had interrupted the Principal was tarred and feathered in an adjoining lot, and ridden on a rail to a levee. Unfortunately all efforts of the police to discover the perpetrators of this reprehensible proceeding have failed. It is generally supposed to have been the work of some negroes who were listening through the open windows and whose feelings were hurt by the slight insinuation of the stranger as to the value of colored infants.

While thus calling attention to the similarity between Mr. Spencer's philosophic methods and those of Principal Brown, I do not wish to make any personal comparison between the two philoso-

phers. Since he was under fear of tar and feathers, that would be unjust to Principal Brown.